

# New budget has more good news than bad

## State plan helps county avoid most layoffs, cuts

By **Daniel J. Chacón**  
STAFF WRITER

The \$105 billion state budget the governor is expected to sign tomorrow means that San Diego County will avoid most of the layoffs it had planned and that some cuts to services and programs will be restored.

Libraries in Del Mar, El Cajon, Fallbrook, Rancho San Diego and Vista will be open on Sundays. A regional communications network used by firefighters and police will get nearly \$23 million.

CHOICE, a program that teams college students with youths on probation, will get \$600,000. STAR/PAL, a diversion program that brings sports, police and at-risk youth together, will receive \$70,000.

The county also will restore 55 positions in the Probation Department, allowing 100 beds at Juvenile Hall in Kearny Mesa and Camp Barrett in Alpine to stay open.

The department, however, has eliminated 270 positions.

It will no longer operate ROPP, a community-based program to prevent youth from getting into trouble. About half of the 202 beds at the Juvenile Ranch Facility in Campo also have been taken out of use this year.

"It's good news, in that we fared better than we originally thought we would," said Walt Ekard, the county's chief administra-

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### Some services and programs will be restored

tive officer. "But it's tinged with some significant concerns about what's going to happen next year."

The state budget that legislative leaders and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger agreed to depends on nearly \$7 billion in

borrowing and one-time savings that might lead to a bigger spending imbalance.

More than a quarter of the county's budget comes from the state. The county's \$4.05 billion budget for fiscal 2005, adopted in June by the Board of Supervisors, is about 1 percent slimmer than last year's.

So even though the cuts from the state won't be as deep as expected, county residents could feel the effects of the reductions.

The Department of Child Support Services, no longer at

risk of losing \$9 million as predicted, has shrunk from 747 workers in 2003 to 614 now.

"In some way, shape or form, we're going to have to reorganize and put people and resources where they're needed most," said John Rosenthal, a department spokesman.

The Public Defender's and Alternate Public Defender's offices, will lose 11 lawyers rather than the 29 originally proposed.

Overall, the county has eliminated 986 vacant positions in fiscal 2005 and laid off 45 employees, significantly fewer

than the 411 workers who received layoff notices from Ekard in May.

Many of the employees facing layoffs found other county jobs.

"We put people through a lot of trauma by waiting this long. They've been in limbo for quite a while now," said Mary Grillo, executive director of the Service Employees International Union Local 2028.

The union had urged the supervisors to adopt a spending plan that used revised figures the governor proposed in May

so fewer workers would have to fear job losses.

Under the May plan, the county's revenues from the state would be cut by \$126.4 million instead of the \$153.4 million Schwarzenegger proposed in January.

The supervisors refused to use the governor's revised numbers, which ultimately were made part of the final state budget.

Most cities, including San Diego, won't have to adjust their fiscal 2005 budgets because they used the revenue

cuts Schwarzenegger recommended in May.

San Diego officials feared that the state would take revenue from jail booking fees, but the city included its \$5.2 million share in its budget and the state is providing the revenue, city budget director Ron Villa said.

"We kept our fingers crossed," Villa said.

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Staff writer Matthew T. Hall contributed to this report.